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GREEK EPIGRAMS OF DAMIANUS BENESSA

Damianus Benessa (1476-1539), a Latin poet of Dubrovnik, is generally considered to be one of the most versatile representatives of humanism on the east coast of the Adriatic in the early 16th century. Remembered mostly for his voluminous Christian epic *De morte Christi*, composed in some 8500 Latin hexameters, which was published from the autograph only in 2006, Benessa is the author of another surviving manuscript, which contains his smaller-scale poetry and totals some 8000 Latin verses comprising three books of epigrams, a book of eclogues, two books of lyric poetry and a book of satires. The evident humanistic concept of this poetic venture, based on the generic models of classical antiquity, is made even more obvious by Benessa's seven Latin renditions of Greek epigrams belonging to the *Anthologia Planudea* and especially by nine original epigrams that he composed in ancient Greek. This particular segment of Benessa's oeuvre, a total of 30 elegiac couplets written in the second linguistic medium of humanism, is a *unicum* among the surviving works of Croatian humanist poets and therefore has an undisputed importance for Croatian literary and cultural history. However, Benessa's Greek poems, along with most of the aforementioned Latin poems from the same manuscript, remained almost completely unexplored up to our age, due to their poor readability as well as to their questionable comprehensibility and literary value. This paper presents the results of a basic philological analysis of Benessa's poetic production in Greek, and tries to explain its origin in the context of contemporary Greek poetry in Italy.

Key words: Damianus Benessa, Dubrovnik, humanist poetry in Greek, epigram